

**A Guide to EML Gala Swimming at Saffron Seals.**

JANUARY 2017.

Attending a gala for the first time can be a daunting experience for both swimmer and parent. Hopefully this information will help make it a positive and successful one.

**What is EML?**

Essex Mini League provides a framework for competition between amateur swimming clubs within Essex. There are currently 18 clubs that take part. Each club swims against every other club during the season. The league operates much like a football league, with points being accrued for positions in races at every gala.

Last year we had some great swims and finished in a fantastic 8th place.

This year we have 5 fixtures on:

 11th February 2017 – Southend.

 11th March 2017 – Home Gala at Lord Butler.

 13th May 2017 – Brentwood.

 10th June 2017 – Romford.

 9th September 2017 – Canvey.

\*Please mark these dates on your calendars \*

The EML is aimed at swimmers who have not achieved County Qualifying Times, and operates with upper time limits for races. Swimmers must swim slower than the time limits or they are issued with time faults and do not score points for their club. EML therefore offers the more novice members of the club the opportunity to experience competition. Andy Leeman (Swim Coach) works very hard to select the right team for these events, taking into account the times each swimmer has already achieved.

**How is the EML team chosen?**

The EML squad is not a fixed team: it is fluid to allow as many swimmers as possible the opportunity to improve and compete (obviously we still aspire to improve our position in the league!) Also, each round of the league has an ‘age on date of gala’ restriction and it is possible that some swimmers will be selected early in the season but not later on, purely due to a change in age group.

When choosing the team we will consider:

- Times/PB’s.

- Attitude during training.

- Behaviour and approach at Galas, Open Meets, Club events.

- Availability when selected, and response to selection email.

- A balanced team to meet the age, stroke and distance criteria.

We will also take into account the commitment of swimmers to turn up to past events for their club when picking teams for the future.

**How will I know if my child has been selected?**

Approximately one month prior to the event, Andy will choose a list of swimmers and pass the names onto myself. I will then send out an email invitation, through GroupSpaces. To ensure you receive such communications please check that you have registered with GroupSpaces (see your membership Pack for instructions how to do this) and add emlteammanager@saffronseals.org.uk and leefy32@gmail.com to your address book, as invitations have been known to arrive in the spam folder!

**If your child is invited please make every effort to be available.**

Please reply to any invitations ASAP, as I need time to find replacement swimmers and Andy needs enough time to allocate races. If you do not reply within the time frame given I will have to assume your child cannot swim and invite another child.

Once I have all replies, Andy is given the names and allocates the races. If we have sufficient time I am able to send this list to you in advance, with the final arrangements. – everyone is always keen to know what they will be swimming! Sometimes you may be asked to swim a stroke that is not your favourite or best. There is always a good reason for this decision, so just encourage your swimmer to try their best.

After confirming your place, if your child is sick, or cannot swim, or if there are traffic problems and you are going to be late, please call me (see details below).

**Gala Preparation.**

Preparation is an important factor before a gala and this information is aimed at helping your child achieve their best.

Parents are responsible for getting their child to the gala. Make sure you know where the pool is, and that you arrive in plenty of time to allow your child to change and sign in ready to start the warm up.

Ideally swimmers should not eat a large meal two hours before they swim. Regular snacks throughout the day are ideal. Swimmers should also be well rested.

Please make sure your child is aware of how they are getting home from the gala and where to meet you.

Pack swimming bags in advance. Swimmers will need:

* **Club swimwear**
* **Goggles**
* **Club swimming hat**

(We recommend bringing spares in case of last minute hitches!)

* **Towel x 2** (one to take poolside).
* **T-bag top** for poolside - keeping your muscles warm helps you swim better.
* **Plenty to drink** – It is important to keep well hydrated, but no fizzy drinks or glass poolside.
* **Snacks** – please send your child with sensible snacks (crackers, muesli bars, Jaffa cakes). A helpful tip is to put these into tubs!
* **Change for lockers**.

**At the Pool.**

Arrival on time is vital. It is essential that all swimmers have a warm up.

Firstly swimmers must present themselves to me (or another designated poolside helper) to sign in. Look out for a yellow Seals top either in the entrance lobby or poolside.

Swimmers go poolside on their own. If your child is nervous or unsure what to do let me know and I will try to buddy them up with an older Seals swimmer. Each competing club will have a designated area to sit in, and swimmers need to stay in our area while waiting for their races.

There will be parent helpers poolside (marshals) who will have a race schedule and will call swimmers up for their races accordingly. However some swimmers like to know what they are swimming beforehand and write their race numbers on their hand/arm to remember.

The gala usually lasts around 2 hours so some swimmers bring small poolside activities such as cards, Top Trumps, etc to amuse themselves. Please note the Club cannot take responsibility for these items, and water doesn’t always mix well with electronics!

Spectators typically need to pay to enter. This is usually £1.50-£3. Sometimes clubs will also sell raffle tickets, programmes and cakes to raise extra funds for the home club. You will also need plenty of fluids and layered clothing – as it gets VERY hot poolside! Some pools have limited seating too, so be prepared to be cramped.

We start with the warm-up. This usually takes about 30 minutes. Swimmers are encouraged to keep moving at a steady pace and remember to practice their turns and finishes. Generally we start with the younger ones, then older ones. Followed by diving practice if time permits.

Once the races start they progress very quickly!

The races and gala are run according to the ASA laws and rules. There is a set list of events, which includes individual races and relays. Swimmers compete in age appropriate races: 9 years, 10 and under, 11 and under, 13 and under, Open.

Every race will give the swimmer the opportunity to:

1. Improve their experience in competition.

2. Gain possible swimming sprint awards.

3. Gain a Personal Best (PB) time. (recorded by the club).

4. Make new friends.

During the Gala Andy is usually at the starting blocks to reassure, instruct and encourage swimmers. I (or another designated club member/parent helper) will be at the opposite end boosting them on and instructing the relay teams. We are a very friendly team and most of the older swimmers will spend time with the younger ones poolside, giving them tips and encouraging them too. Generally there is a great atmosphere, which generates real team spirit. Cheering teammates on is encouraged! – parents’ cheering for Seals swimmers is also appreciated!!

During the races swimmers will be instructed by a series of whistles.

**1**. Four long blasts of a whistle indicate the Referee and Judges are ready to start the race.

Get your goggles on!

**At this point everyone** (swimmers and spectators) **must be quiet** so the swimmers can hear instructions clearly.

**2**. On the next long whistle swimmers should take up their starting position either on the starting block, on the poolside or in the water (Backstroke swimmers enter the water).

**3**. When told to “Take your marks” swimmers immediately take up their starting position. When all swimmers are stationary the Starter sounds the starting signal.

Swimmers need to pay particular attention to their starts, turns and finishes. They need to be mentally and physically ready for their race as officials will not hold the race for missing swimmers or forgotten goggles. For this reason we usually send swimmers up for their race in advance.

As well as calling them for their races the Seals poolside helpers will keep an eye on all the swimmers. Swimmers are asked not leave the poolside, without first informing a marshal. (we don’t want anyone to miss their race) and we cannot take responsibility for swimmers that wander off.

We also politely ask that swimmers behave at these events, including being quiet at the start of races. Marshals cannot be expected to repeatedly remind swimmers of their behaviour – please remind your child that they are representing our Club, poolside as well as while racing.

When your child has finished their races you may take them home. If you wish to leave before the end, when the places/points are announced, please make sure your child tells a Seals marshal/parent helper that they are leaving so that they can be signed out.

Results, times, PB times and sprint awards achieved will be posted on the Seals website, under the results section as soon as we have them. Sprint award badges, awarded for achieving particular times for each stroke (the times required can be found on the website under the results tab) can be purchased once achieved from our Awards Co-ordinator; Tracy Rogers awards@saffronseals.org.uk for a small fee.

I think I’ve covered everything you need to know. However, if you have any further questions, or anything needs further explanation I am happy to receive emails or talk to people poolside. I am usually coaching or watching sessions: Mon.3, Tues.1 and 2, Fri.1 and 2, Sat.1 and 2.

If your child does not wish to compete in gala competitions please could you let me know.

Lastly I look forward to meeting many of you and your swimmers at future EML galas.

**GO SAFFRON SEALS!!!**

**(Lets aim for higher than 8th place this year!)**

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